

THE HEALTH OF SITTINGBOURNE IN 1902.

At the last meeting of the Sittingbourne Council the Medical Officer (Dr. H. G. Sutton) presented his report of the health of the district during 1902. The report was as follows:—

"Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—I beg to submit to you my annual report respecting the year 1902, as to the health and sanitary condition of your district.

"Population.—This was (last census) 8,944, and the estimated increase to the middle of last year was 8,979.

"Death Rate and Birth Rate.—The deaths were 130 and the births 260, giving an average for the former of 14.5, and for the latter 29 per 1,000 persons living. The births were 46 less than in 1901. The mortality from those living out of the district, but belonging here, must, however, be considered, and the death rate thereby corrected. These numbered five from the two Infectious Hospitals, and 18 from the Workhouse, which added will give a mortality of 17.03.

"Mortality under One Year of Age.—The deaths were 40, giving an average per thousand registered births of 153.8.

"Zymotic Death Rate.—The deaths were 12 in number, bearing an average of 1.36 to each 1,000 of population. Of these twelve, seven were caused by infantile diarrhoea, and three by measles.

"Physical Features of District.—The district in its physical aspect is flat and low-lying, the highest point being 57 feet above sea level. The geological features consist of brick earth and chalk.

"House Accommodation. — This is exceedingly good, the houses being well built with plenty of air space surrounding. The plans of all new buildings are passed by the Inspector. The working-classes are very well housed, and no case of overcrowding came under my notice during the year. It has not been necessary to close a single house.

"Sewerage and Drainage.—At present received by cesspools, but the water carriage system is now being laid throughout the town, and the excrement will be disposed of by the septic tank method.

"Removal and Disposal of House Refuse.—This is removed by public scavengers every morning and disposed of by filling up large chalk holes. There are no fixed dust bins in the district.

"Water Supply. — From the public works, which analysis has proved more than once to be pure and wholesome. The supply is adequate, but not abundant. It is derived from the deep chalk.

"Slaughter-houses, Dairies and Cowsheds, Lodging Houses, and Offensive Trades. — The slaughter-houses are well attended to, and lime-washed as required. Only one lodging-house exists, and that is now in very good condition. The dairies and cowsheds in the neighbourhood were found to be clean and in good sanitary condition. No offensive trade exists.

"Bakehouses. — These are all above ground, clean and sanitary, and are lime-washed regularly.

"Factories, Workshops, and Work-places Act, 1901.—This year, for the first time, I have to report to you on the administration of the Factory and Workshops Act, 1901, and accordingly have inspected the various places involved thereby. Brickfields.—These I found in a very satisfactory condition, due regard being paid to the welfare of the employees, especially as to the sanitary conveniences. The cement works were also satisfactory. The paper mills, iron foundries, and mineral water works are all well conducted, and call for no adverse comments. The jam factory is everything that can be desired, plenty of air space, good ventilation and sufficient sanitary accommodation being provided. No fault can be found with the builders' workshops. In drapers' shops, where dressmakers are employed, the workrooms are clean, well ventilated, with a sufficiency of air space and light, and also adequate sanitary arrangements are provided. No home work is carried out in the district. An abstract of the

Act is posted up in each place I visited, where required.

"Inspection.—I made a systematic and general inspection of the district and entered a number of reports accordingly as to insanitary surroundings, but these were not of a serious nature, and were at once remedied. But in one instance, the Inspector and myself had to visit many times some most insanitary property in Frederick-street, some of the worst I have ever seen. I recommended that in its then state the dwellings were unfit for habitation, the cesspools were over-flowing, and two cases of diphtheria were removed to hospital. In another instance, in Bassett-road, men were pumping out a cesspool into a field close by, but this was promptly stopped.

"Notification of Infectious Diseases. — These numbered 82, of which 58 were removed to the two hospitals. As far as possible the patients are removed to hospital, and the clothes, etc. (in a covered van) the same day. The accommodation at the Infectious Hospital is ample, and everything that is required, a new diphtheria wing having lately been opened. The Small-pox Hospital is situated some 600 yards away from the main road. Disinfection of clothing and bedding is carried out by a steam disinfecting oven, and the dwellings with mercuric chloride.

"Small-pox.—Fourteen cases were notified, two from the west end, and twelve from the east end of the district. The first instance of the eruption appeared at the police station, in the case of a tramp who had been staying at a lodging house in London, where small-pox was present. The next was in the case of two bargemen, who came home with the disease upon them. Regarding one of these, eight cases altogether in that house were removed to the hospital, which probably would not have happened if re-vaccination had not been obstinately refused. However, all were removed to hospital at once, the clothes disinfected under steam pressure, the walls stripped, and the dwellings disinfected and purified. No cases were notified after May 14th. It will be noticed the contrast in the number of cases between the western and eastern portions of the town. I have no doubt that the disease was imported by bargemen and tramps, who came from London, where small-pox was so prevalent.

"Enteric Fever.—The number of cases notified was eleven. These were scattered all over the district and not confined to any particular quarter. In no case could I trace infection from drinking impure water or contaminated milk, which are the two principal vehicles in spreading the disease.

"Scarlatina. — There were seven cases notified, five in the eastern and two in the western portions of the district. They were all of a mild character, and were all removed to hospital.

"Diphtheria.—Twelve cases were reported from the western and twenty-six from the eastern portions of the district, making thirty-eight in all. In November of last year a threatened outbreak occurred in Cowper-road and the neighbourhood, which was traceable to Murston School, the closure of which I recommended, and then I received no more notifications. Soon after diphtheria was present at the other end of the district, but by strict isolation and advice it did not spread. I feel convinced that the aggregation of children in schools, especially the large number of little ones that attend, is one of the most important factors in propagating the disease, and is extended by contact, kissing each other, sucking their pencils, etc.

"Inspector's Report.—The nuisances were thirty-three, consisting of foul and overflowing w.c.'s, choked drains, accumulation of manure, pigs kept in an offensive state, and one slaughter-house that required lime-washing.

"Doubtless many of the points mentioned in this report are well known to the Council, but I have an order from the Local Government Board to repeat them for their own information and reference.—I have the honour to be, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, your obedient servant,

H. G. Sutton M.D.

M. O. H.

